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International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

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Item 8 of the agenda
Comprehensive review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Round table two
The way forward: building capacity for the sustainable development of small island developing States

(Friday, 14 January 2005, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.)

Summary of discussions prepared by the Co-Chairpersons

1. Round table two addressed the topic "The way forward: building capacity for the sustainable development of small island developing States". The round table was co-chaired by Kessai H. Note, President of the Marshall Islands and Jacob Zuma, Deputy President of South Africa. Leonard Good, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, moderated the interactive discussion.

2. The present summary will be included as part of the official report of the International Meeting.

3. The round-table dialogue focused on the key environmental, economic and social vulnerabilities of the small island developing States and discussed the capacity-building efforts needed to address those vulnerabilities.

4. In the light of the recent earthquake and tsunami affecting the Indian Ocean region, many delegations stressed the environmental vulnerabilities of small island developing States, in particular to natural disasters, adverse impacts of climate change, fragile water supplies, inadequate sanitation and waste management. The adverse effects of climate change and sea-level rise present significant risks to the sustainable development of small island developing States and the long-term effects of climate change may threaten the very existence of some small island developing States.

5. Many participants acknowledged a growing concern for the social vulnerabilities that confront small island developing States. In recent years, the importance of social development issues has been embraced by small island developing States, notably issues relating to health, preservation of indigenous

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culture, gender equality and education. These were underpinned by broad concerns regarding poverty as a root cause of a range of social stresses.

6. Culture has emerged as an important issue in the follow-up to the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Some of the issues are the protection of cultural heritage and cultural diversity, the preservation of indigenous languages, strengthening of cultural industries, and the protection and conservation of traditional knowledge.

7. In the area of health, HIV/AIDS is a grave and growing threat in small island developing States and is compounded by high levels of migration and persistent cultural taboos on the open discussion of sexual practices. Other chronic diseases and health conditions in small island developing States are diabetes, obesity, hypertension, tuberculosis and malaria.

8. Education to address the lack of technical and managerial capacity in most small island societies is one of the most critical cross-cutting factors limiting the ability of small island developing States to pursue sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

9. It was mentioned that although small island developing States nationals send back considerable remittances to their home countries, such remittances can hardly compensate for the technical and intellectual capacity that has been lost. Such nationals could be encouraged to provide technical assistance and capacity-building, as well as to assist in the mobilization of external resources.

10. Participants in the round table identified a number of very specific recommendations for action with respect to capacity-building.

Action-oriented recommendations

11. The following recommendations were identified for strengthening environmental capacities:

(a) Mobilize external resources for capacity-building in environmental protection. For example, Italy announced the establishment of an international programme for environmental development to provide financing for training for environmental protection and sustainable development;

(b) Establish and build institutional capacities for regional and subregional early warning and information systems. Early warning systems are linked to the availability of information and communication technology (ICT), so capacity-building efforts for these two areas should be linked. This could also help to eliminate the digital divide;

(c) Increase efforts related to capacity-building to address the threat of climate change, including vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning;

(d) Strengthen and establish clearing houses for information on climate change and its adverse impacts on small island developing States so that they can better support the development of projects addressing climate change adaptation measures;

(e) Build capacity in small island developing States related to the formulation and implementation of clear development mechanism projects under the Kyoto Protocol;

(f) Create regional projects and programmes that utilize local human resources for biodiversity assessment, conservation and land-use planning;

(g) Provide support and capacity-building for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of small island developing States, particularly with respect to coral reefs, fish stocks and establishment of biodiversity corridors on land, such as the Meso-American bio-Reef programme and the Meso-American biological corridor;

(h) Provide capacity-building assistance to small island developing States for the development and further implementation of freshwater and sanitation programmes, and the promotion of integrated water resources management;

(i) Assist communities by building skill sets in environmental conservation and management, since local communities, especially indigenous peoples, have strong spiritual linkages with the natural environment.

12. The following recommendations were identified for strengthening economic capacities:

(a) Strengthen the capacity of small island developing States to participate more effectively in intergovernmental negotiations, including those related to climate change, trade and fishing;

(b) Diversify the economic base of small island developing States to improve competitive advantage through capacity-building at the regional and international levels, inter alia, in ICT, science and technology, and development of cultural industries;

(c) Consider debt relief and even debt cancellation for the poorest countries;

(d) Strengthen regional and subregional approaches to capacity-building to overcome the lack of critical mass in small island developing States in such areas as social development, health, monetary policies, capital market development, trade negotiations and regional negotiation machinery, such as that implemented in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM);

(e) Enhance and further establish South-South cooperation, with the support of donors, so as to maximize the comparative advantages and best practices of developing countries. A number of countries expressed interest in providing training in specific areas where they have expertise, namely, Cuba, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Singapore;

(f) Build small island developing States capacities for integrated planning processes related to responsible tourism that address such issues as tourism supply and demand, carrying capacity, resource utilization and economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts;

(g) Support capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening ICT literacy and skills development;

(h) Create subregional hubs for ICT among small island developing States. For example, India is building a cyber city to create a hub for ICT in Mauritius through South-South cooperation, and has established cooperative ICT programmes with 30 small island developing States;

(i) Support ICT networks, early warning systems, remote sensing, computer-based systems for mapping, and wireless technologies. A number of countries have highlighted new initiatives and ongoing efforts to advance capacity-building in these areas;

(j) Support and promote centres of excellence to build capacities in science and technology that also draw on traditional knowledge. It was noted that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without capacity-building in science and technology, in particular in the areas of renewable energy applications and ocean sciences;

(k) Build capacities at the national and regional levels to develop renewable energy and enhance energy efficiency;

(l) Support on-the-job training as an important aspect of continuous learning and adult education;

(m) Formalize relationships and mechanisms for partnerships to facilitate the participation of small island developing States experts of the diaspora interested in offering their skills for development in small island developing States.

13. The following recommendations were identified for strengthening social and human capacities:

(a) Provide international support for capacity-building and awareness-raising in order to combat HIV/AIDS, in partnership with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. One example was the Pan-Caribbean partnership in the fight against HIV/AIDS for resource mobilization and training. Similar regional programmes should be launched in other regional groupings of small island developing States;

(b) Build the capacities of both men and women to promote cultural industries based on indigenous arts, music, crafts and festivals, and to protect cultural heritage and local languages through educational curricula;

(c) Strengthen indigenous cultures and their communities to preserve traditional knowledge and as a guide to sustainable development. Civil society is an important partner in capacity-building for sustainable livelihoods, financing for development, climate change adaptation and resilience, integrated land and water planning, conserving unique island biodiversity and empowering communities to preserve traditional cultural heritage;

(d) Balance top-down educational approaches with community-based cultural heritage. For example, the University of the West Indies has a cultural studies institute for the protection of cultural heritage, culture management, cultural industries and creative arts;

(e) Support the proposed establishment of a consortium of tertiary institutions for capacity-development and education in small island developing States, including regional centres of excellence, technical development facilities for traditional knowledge and virtual universities;

(f) Invest in education, particularly for women and girls, as the best means of alleviating poverty and achieving sustainable development;

(g) Support education in those small island developing States where the capacity of teachers is low, educational materials are in short supply and access to ICT is almost non-existent;

(h) Promote distance-learning, including at the secondary and tertiary levels of education through ICT, in order to build needed capacity and as a means of combating brain drain;

(i) Build systemic, institutional and individual capacities for legislative, regulatory and policy development;

(j) Combat the problem of brain drain through the establishment of systems at the national level to provide incentives for experts to invest their skills at home;

(k) Support the development of non-governmental and civil society structures, and promote the sharing of expertise and lessons learned in support of the implementation of the Programme of Action and the mobilization of additional social and human resources;

(l) Build institutional and human resource capacity by working with indigenous cultures to foster traditional approaches to the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(m) Include women and girls in all educational and capacity-building efforts, including in building cultural industries;

(n) Provide capacity-building to ensure that small island developing States can address increased security demands without compromising their other development imperatives.